



U.S. Immigration  
and Customs  
Enforcement

# News Release

February 21, 2006

## **MAN FOUND GUILTY OF IMPORTING MORE THAN 950 KILOS OF COCAINE**

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico—U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) today announced the conviction of Luis Vilches Navarrete, 57, for conspiracy to import 950.5 kilograms (2091 pounds) of cocaine and 50 grams of heroin aboard the M/V Babouth, a Honduran flag cargo vessel navigating in high seas.

On Jan. 31, 2005, the HMS Wave Ruler, a British ship with a United States Coast Guard (USCG) law enforcement detachment on board was conducting a routine patrol when it intercepted the M/V Babouth for a routine and random inspection.

Inclement weather and sea conditions prevented the completion of the inspection in high seas and the USCG Cutter Shamel, a 179-foot patrol vessel, escorted the M/V Babouth to the port of San Juan for a more indepth inspection.

During the more aggressive inspection at the USCG base in San Juan, ICE and other federal and state agents discovered several bales that tested positive for cocaine and heroin and proceeded to arrest nine crew members of the M/V Babouth (four Colombians, two Peruvians, one Haitian, one Chilean and one from Tanzania).

Vilches Navarrete, captain of the M/V Babouth and a citizen of Chile, was the only crew member who did not plead guilty to the conspiracy to import narcotics charges. He was found guilty in federal court Friday.

“This was a tremendous effort and shows the commitment of federal and local law enforcement agencies to fight crime, sending a clear message that we will continue to investigate and prosecute those involved in criminal activity in our jurisdiction,” said Lydia St. John-Mellado, acting special agent in charge of the ICE Office of Investigations in Puerto Rico. Thanks to the diligent efforts of all the agencies involved in this operation, ICE prevented a large amount of dangerous drugs from reaching the streets of Puerto Rico.”

The 950.5 kilograms of cocaine seized had an approximate street value of \$22 million while the 50 grams heroin was valued at \$3,000.

Vilches Navarrete, along with the other crew members of the M/V Babouth are in federal custody at the Metropolitan Detention Center in Guaynabo, Puerto Rico where they await sentencing.

# ICE #

*U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of four integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.*